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SUBJECT: MADURA -- DOMINANT POLITICAL ROLE OF NAHDLATUL ULAMA (NU)

REF: A. SURABAYA 78 (SURAMADU BRIDGE)

[1](#)B. SURABAYA 71 (EAST JAVA NU CONFERENCE)

This message is sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: The moderate Islamic organization Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) enjoys widespread support among the conservative Muslim population of Madura. Although not officially involved in politics, NU religious leaders "Kiais" are influential community leaders, running larger educational institutions, working with international and local NGOs to address health concerns, and supporting candidates. While decentralization has disrupted coordination among regencies, NU fosters coordination through parliamentary representation and regular inter-NU meetings. PKNU, a splinter party from Gus Dur's National Awakening Party (PKB) reportedly has substantial support within Madura's population and among the Kiai. The PKNU vice-regent candidate in Pamekasan described PKNU as "more democratic" than PKB, although non-Muslims cannot serve on the board. End Summary.

The People Will Follow NU

[1](#)2. (SBU) In the course of a November 20-21 visit to three regencies on the island of Madura, Surabaya Principal Officer and Pol/Econ Assistant met with 20 Kiai from NU in the Sampang regency. These Kiai operate religious schools (pesantrens) educating 1,000-2,000 students each. An estimated 96% of the Sampang regency are NU members, with the remaining 4% members of Indonesia's second largest Islamic organization Muhammadiyah, Christian, or Chinese. The Chairman of the Sampang Election Commission described ethnic Madurese as "fanatical about their religion and maintaining their culture, and loyal to their leaders." NU plays a leading, influential role in all aspects of life in Sampang and the three other regencies on Madura. One Sampang NU Kiai commented that "the people will do what NU instructs them to do."

Insufficient Emphasis on Education and Health

[1](#)3. (SBU) Sampang NU criticized local officials for failing to establish educational and training programs to prepare the population for the economic development that will follow the late-2008 completion of the Surabaya-Madura bridge (REF A). Without such preparation, NU worries, local Madurese will be observers rather than participants in economic opportunities. They blamed limited budgets and a failure to plan for the government's inability to provide suitable skills training. Sampang NU suggested that Madura would benefit from the

establishment of a new Madurese province, in order to cut down on the levels of bureaucracy between Madura and central government funding sources. The Kiais explained that Madura's oil and gas exploration revenues were being held by the East Java provincial government and not equitably distributed.

¶4. (SBU) Sampang NU described education and health as the primary problems facing Sampang. The Kiais explained that NU had tried to work with the local health department to improve the health sector, but any cooperation had been undermined by government corruption. They commented that Sampang NU had a good track record and experience working with international and local NGOs on humanitarian projects. They recommended that foreign assistance agencies and NGOs work directly with NU on local programs rather than working with government officials. Sampang NU also stressed that NU had established networks for coordination across regencies, and had the ability to encourage local government action through parliamentary representation.

PKB vs PKNU

¶5. (SBU) Madura's NU members may not be united in their support of Gus Dur's National Awakening Party (PKB). According to Suhaib, the rector of Madura Islamic University and a vice-regent candidate in Pamekasan's March 2008 election, the PKB splinter party Ulama National Awakening Party (PKNU) is supported by 75% of key leaders within Madura's NU community. He added that 20-30,000 people attended a PKNU August 2007 political gathering in Pamekasan. Suhaib explained that PKNU was "more democratic" than PKB and is open to members from all religious groups. He stressed, however, that non-Muslims could not become PKNU board members. PKB's effectiveness, he explained, had been undermined by conflicts created because board members were from various religions.

MCCLELLAND